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Remembering the Finnish Civil War: Embodied empathy and *Fellman Field*.

Hanna Korsberg, Laura-Elina Aho, Iris Chassany and Sofia Valtanen

On 28 April 2013, ninety-five years after Finland's civil war (27 January-15 May 1918), artist Kaisa Salmi created a performance called Fellman Field: A Living Monument to 22,000 People. It was a site-specific event organised at Fellman Park in Lahti. There, for almost a week in 1918, thousands of civil war prisoners were held to await transportation to a prison camp. In 2013, an impressive number of people (close to 10,000) gathered at this site to participate in a commemoration of the civil war, which is still one of the most repressed traumas in the national consciousness of the Finns. This article discusses Fellman Field as an artwork in terms of its utilization of embodied empathy: the sympathetic understanding of the other through physical and emotional experience. The case of Fellman Field demonstrates the challenges and successes of a site-specific participatory performance that aims to promote understanding and constructively handle the complexity of a national tragedy.

‘Four generations have been born since 1918, but each of us certainly carries the scars of that war in their DNA. The task of my generation—soon to be the oldest—is to tell why . . . what happened? How did they survive . . . everything? The time to keep silent is over. Hopefully, speaking is going to build and not break us. We are not yet a harmonious nation.’¹

Marja-Leena Parkkinen, Facebook comment (28 April 2013)

‘As site of cultural intervention and innovation, performance is a place of experiment, claim, conflict, negotiation, transgression: a place where preconceptions, expectations and critical faculties

may be dislocated and confounded. [...] At site it may do this at the very locales of that which is under critique [...].'²

Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance* (2010)

On 28 April 2013, ninety-five years after Finland's civil war (27 January-15 May 1918), the artist Kaisa Salmi created a performance called *Fellman Field: A Living Monument to 22,000 People*.³ It was a site-specific event organized at Fellman Park in the vicinity of Lahti in southeastern Finland. For almost a week in 1918, thousands of civil war prisoners were held in Fellman Park to await transportation to a prison camp. In 2013, an impressive number of people (close to 10,000) gathered at the same site to participate in a commemoration of the civil war, which is still one of the most repressed traumas in the national consciousness of the Finns. In our article we will discuss *Fellman Field* as an artwork in terms of its approach to embodied empathy.⁴ We consider embodied empathy to be the sympathetic understanding of the other through physical and emotional experience. Where empathy is typically understood as an emotional or intellectual identification with information, embodied empathy often feels more holistic and personal because the identification to a bodily experience of another is triggered by one's own physical experience; for example, the simulation of bodily actions and sensory conditions.

We endeavour to examine whether the ineluctable fact of a history-shaping violent conflict can be processed in a productive way by means of a participatory performance. To achieve our goal, we need to consider *Fellman Field* from several perspectives. Its potential to create embodied empathy rests on its engagement with three key elements: site specificity, bodily experience and participation. Our article discusses how each of these elements contributes to the objective of generating embodied empathy. In the context of this performance we refer to embodied empathy both as a desired participant experience and an instrument of creating that experience.

While we discuss the performance and its effects, our impression of the public response primarily relies on discussions and reports of the event in the media and the audience reactions in the organizer's Facebook page.⁵ The page was originally founded for inviting people to the event, but we found the reactions and discussion on the page particularly interesting for analysing participant experience. The focus on written responses is fruitful for our research since these responses allow us to read about the experience as described by participants themselves, as opposed to being forced to make interpretations based on perceived live reactions. We are looking for traces of embodied empathy in the written comments.

The article begins with a brief overview of the historical and social contexts relevant to *Fellman Field*. We will give a short introduction to the content of the performance, but our main focus is on the most vital elements in producing embodied empathy: first the site, then bodily experience, proceeding to participation on both physical and virtual levels, after which we consider the political implications and controversies of *Fellman Field* and the challenge they pose to the production of embodied empathy. We will also examine whether or not a performance can successfully or ethically attempt to seek reconciliation with the past.

The Civil War of 1918: A traumatic experience for the new nation

Finland's civil war in 1918 was the culmination of political tensions that arose in the aftermath of the First World War and the revolution in Russia the previous year.⁶ The revolution had created an opportunity for Finland to declare independence from Russia, which was announced on 6 December 1917. However, the events of 1917 had divided Finnish political forces into two sides.⁷ The labour movement and the bourgeois parties had differing ideas on how to pursue Finnish independence and on how to organize power in the newly sovereign state. Collapsed social structures caused class

conflict to fester. During the winter, political tensions escalated all over the country and led to strikes, violent clashes between the left and the right, and the establishment of armed groups: the middle classes formed the White Civil Guards and the White Army, while the socialists established the Red Guards.⁸

The war started in January and ended in May 1918 with a victory for the Whites. It resulted in the deaths of 38,000 people, 85 per cent of whom were Reds.⁹ By the end of the war, the Whites had imprisoned 80,000 Red soldiers in concentration camps around the country, where they awaited trial for treason or political crimes.¹⁰ The majority of the victims died in the prison camps. In April and May of 1918, more than 20,000 Red soldiers and civilians—many of whom were women and children—were confined in a temporary prison camp at Fellman field in Lahti. The prisoners were held for almost a week before they were transported to a prison camp in nearby Hennala.¹¹ Some of them were killed at Fellman field, but more than 13,000 died later in Hennala, most of them from hunger and disease.¹²

(Fig. 1)

The civil war divided the Finnish nation into ‘the victors and the defeated’, a division that would cast a shadow over Finns’ political and psychological landscape for decades. The perspective on the war of the victors (meaning the middle class) dominated the public discourse until the 1960s. Slowly, the nation was able to regain unity through the experience of fighting an external enemy during the Second World War, as well as through the post-war project of building a Nordic welfare state. Although the sharp division between Red and White allegiances would seem to have receded in the consciousness of Finnish society today, the ‘national catastrophe’ in Finland’s very first steps as an independent state remains an integral part of the collective historical narrative.¹³ The disastrous violence at the beginning of the sovereign nation traumatized generations and continues to dismay new ones.

In a European context (especially following the Second World War) questions of history, memory, guilt, victimhood, participation and trauma have been approached in various performative ways.¹⁴ While this discussion is both relevant and ongoing in Finland, it is our view that the nation's most pressing questions and silenced memories are related to the civil war of 1918. The need for constructive discussion arises from the fact that the civil war itself is still a topic of controversy among Finns. In the case of *Fellman Field*, the attempt at reconciliation was apparent from the moment Salmi invited people from all over Finland through traditional and social media to join the performance: 'We are all there in the same situation, together, with our different backgrounds. The aim of the movements and the course of events is to bring together those histories, to accept history and declare that it happened. Reconciliation is the purpose here.'¹⁵

The use of the term 'reconciliation' to describe the aim of an artwork about an historical armed conflict risks leading to misunderstandings. Thus, we take particular care in explaining how we conceive of reconciliation in the context of our argument and case study. It is not in our interest to make judgements, assign blame, dismiss the conflict or demand apology from either party to the conflict. When we ask whether it is possible to reconcile the painful trauma of the past through embodied empathy—the reconciliation with which we are concerned is not between the two sides of the original conflict, but between the present day citizen and the unimaginable violence that tore apart the society in 1918.

While not unprecedented as a performative representation of the civil war in Finland, *Fellman Field* is unique in both popularity and form. Even though Salmi's ambitious goal of simulating the prison camp conditions with 22,000 participants did not come to fruition, the performance is the largest participatory performance ever staged in Finland. The attraction of this participatory site-specific performance was the subject matter, and the number of participants reveals its significance in the minds of Finns. The discussion that followed across social media

indicates that not only did the artist choose an affective topic, but also, we argue, she successfully employed an effective performance method, which we have called embodied empathy.

Sensing the weight of the past

The hour-long performance consisted of partly choreographed and partly improvised elements including music, texts, site and movement.¹⁶ Music and text were the most traditional parts of the event performed to the audience rather than necessarily requiring their participation. We argue that their purpose was to set a conciliatory tune to the performance. The event began with a song, *Työväen Marseljeesi* ('The Workers' Marseillaise'; a Russian revolutionary song to the French tune *La Marseillaise*). The song's lyrics deal with the struggles faced by the working class and the freedom they wanted to achieve. The performance ended with encouraging the participants to join in to sing the song to new lyrics written for this event. Instead of pointing out class differences or conflicting aims, the lyrics focused on the shared challenges of humanity such as adapting to the accelerating speed of change in the world.

The participants were reminded of the history of the site by a text read from a small stage by actors: 'One per cent of Finns were killed in that war. [...] It took six months to kill them. Is that a lot or only a little? They amounted to 36,640 people. Is that a lot? Was it a long time ago? Somewhere else, right now, the same number of people die of hunger every 36 hours.'¹⁷ The text was trying to put the tragedy of the war into a contemporary perspective by bringing up the numbers of those killed in a neutral tone. Both rewriting the lyrics to a labour movement song and the effort to grasp the extent of the past violence support the work's goal of promoting understanding and human solidarity.

As thematically relevant as the texts were to the piece, the whole existence of Salmi's performance was based on the specific place. As Mike Pearson claims, the social, cultural, political, geographical and architectural aspects of the *context* at a performance site may inform or prescribe

the structure and content of the presentation.¹⁸ *Fellman Field* could not have taken place elsewhere without losing a great deal of its meaning and connection with the events of the past.

Following Pierre Nora, the performance site was both a *lieu d'histoire* and a *lieu de mémoire*. Nora argues that, in order for a site or a place to become a *lieu de mémoire*, there needs to be the intention to remember; otherwise, the site would be a *lieu d'histoire*.¹⁹ Whereas in 1918 there was a large field right outside the town of Lahti (then a township of 6,500 inhabitants, now a municipality of 120,000), there is now public park, Fellman Park, and urban sprawl surrounds the site. The decision to preserve the area as a park indicates an intention to remember, thus making the place a *lieu de mémoire*.

The park contains an official monument to Red prisoners created by the sculptor Erkki Kannosto and erected in 1978 as a symbol of what happened in that place in 1918.²⁰ Five bronze figures before a granite gate on a 14-metre-wide square platform portray Red prisoners being released from captivity. The monument was the spatial centre of the *Fellman Field* event with some segments performed on the platform. In our opinion, the choice to incorporate the monument into the performance was a recognition of past efforts to commemorate the history of the site. To the previous layers of memorialization—namely, the park preserved as a *lieu de mémoire* and the civil war monument—the performance added a live form of commemorating. This time, the monument invited bodily engagement and identification, hence the official title *Fellman Field: A Living Monument to 22,000 People*.

In site-specific performances the sense of locality is central.²¹ For the participants from the Lahti area, the site in its current state is familiar from everyday life. The performance had the potential to change the way they felt about the place forever afterwards. As one participant described the occurrence on Facebook, ‘Thank you for letting me attend and experience this unbelievably powerful event. Lahti feels different now.’²² The experience of the site or the lack of

experience beforehand can also be considered as one aspect of the performance itself, as appears in this comment: 'It is great that we talk about the things that have been silenced before. When I was in school, I remember how the events of the year 1918 were quickly run through with just a few sentences and paragraphs. Today the subject is taught more matter-of-factly. It is interesting to learn about the events in Fellman Park.'²³

Fellman Field created a place for negotiating the participants' comprehension of past events. Producing the performance at the historically accurate site with an enormous number of people seems to us like an invitation for the participants to physically imagine themselves as the prisoners in that same place almost one hundred years before and to experience the location as one aspect of this historical event. Such site-specific performances can also be powerful vehicles for remembering and forming a community, as, according to Jen Harvie, 'the location can work as a potent mnemonic trigger, helping to evoke specific past times related to the place and time of performance and facilitating a negotiation between the meanings of those times'.²⁴

Embodying the experience

According to Mike Pearson, performance works with and on all the senses so the visual aspect does not need to take precedence. He sees the emphasis of a site-specific performance as being on bodily contact, corporeality and embodiment. What (and who) you hear, see, smell, grasp, touch lightly or bump into forms your experience of the performance. Therefore, the participants' sensual engagement could be considered phenomenological.²⁵ Site-specific performance thus may offer the audience new sensual experiences; at an outdoor site the participants are more aware of the surface, the climate and the ambiance in a way that differs from a traditional theatre space.²⁶

Fellman Field certainly engaged all senses of its participants. Bodily experience was built on participation in the mass choreography led by 120 volunteers—the number of White military officials who had been in charge of guarding the camp in 1918. Instead of aiming at

historical accuracy, the choreography functioned as an allusive simulation of the conditions of the camp. The movements were simple: the crowd was asked to turn their heads or lift their arms in simultaneous motion, to move in unison, making small moves or gestures, looking around to find a piece of bread, turning to look in the eyes of a stranger and hugging them. Many participants in *Fellman Field* described taking part in moving together and sensing the crowd of thousands of people as an emotional experience. One of them wrote, ‘When the movements were practised, I was a bit sceptical about whether people would come along and experience it with their bodies. False belief! It was an amazing feeling to hear 7,000 people crying out with full hearts and calling to their mothers for help. Also the silence of 7,000 people was indescribable. Thank you, PEOPLE!’²⁷ Amazement at the power of the bodily participation also comes across in another comment: ‘I was surprised by how touching the movement was. Tears flowed freely when I let myself live the events. A cleansing experience.’²⁸

As *Fellman Field* was arranged at the same time of year as the events that took place on the field in 1918, we also consider the season as one of the features of the site-specific and physical experience. The cool and changeable weather of early Finnish spring as well as the wet and cold ground potentially took the participants’ minds to the bodily experience of the prisoners who were imprisoned there for a week with hardly any shelter. One participant described how the weather conditions made her feel during the performance: ‘The sleet was a very persuasive creator of the atmosphere and the sun warmed wonderfully at the end.’²⁹ We interpret these comments as signs of the participants’ emotional identification with the bodily experiences of the prisoners. In our opinion, the act of moving and simulating the events in historic surroundings creates a possibility for embodied empathy with historical events and subjects.

Participation at several sites

Participatory art posits people themselves as the most important artistic media and material. As such, participatory art tends to focus on the process of making art instead of focussing on the end product, as Claire Bishop has defined.³⁰ *Fellman Field* had two kinds of audiences—primary and secondary—who participated in different ways. The primary audience consists of those who participated in *Fellman Field* at site, while the secondary audience refers to those who encountered the performance through various mediating vehicles including social media. According to Bishop, these can be anything from material objects to abstract concepts or they can take the form of an image or a story. They serve as ‘evidence’ of the premise, events and effects of the artwork for those who were not present to participate and witness them first hand.³¹

The secondary audience of *Fellman Field* was vast. As a widely publicized and discussed event, it drew the attention of several media outlets, and in the days following the performance it was also covered on traditional media. The performance was made into a short documentary film, which was later shown at several museums, galleries and film festivals around Finland and abroad.³² In addition—on the fringes of the ‘official’ promotion, yet simultaneously at the heart of the artwork as an essential ‘recruitment channel’—there was the social media presence on the official *Fellman Field* Facebook page. The Facebook page can be seen as a virtual site of the performance that served both audiences: the participants were able to share their experiences of the performance, while the secondary audience could see the evidence and join the conversation. The artistic working group also used the platform to communicate to their audiences, both primary and secondary.

Discussing the participation of the primary audience we draw from Diana Taylor who argues that even people who were not present at a given event (in our case the civil war) can be concerned and can experience powerful feelings through a performance. Although it can be said that embodied knowledge disappears because it cannot be contained or recovered from archival documents, there are multiple forms of embodied acts that are ‘always present, reconstructing

themselves—transmitting communal memories, histories and values from one group/generation to the next.’³³ The movements choreographed in Salmi’s performance—such as looking for a piece of bread and raising a hand to ask for help—are ways to convey feelings, and the experience generates emotions throughout the entire body.³⁴ The participants embraced history and sometimes also past generations by engaging in physical contact with the people around them.³⁵

Sruti Bala notes that theatrical spectatorship can be a mode of witnessing.³⁶ The participatory action of *Fellman Field* functions in a similar way and concerns both the primary and secondary audiences. For the primary audience, appropriating choreography and performing meaningful movements was not only a way to impersonate, but also a way of witnessing the events of 1918. This can potentially help to generate public reflection and this is something that Salmi was both interested in and successful in doing, as can be observed in the comments on social media.³⁷ Based on news articles and the comments on the Facebook page, it is evident that many participants had personal connections with the civil war and the location. Several people shared their family stories with the Facebook page before and after the performance, describing the violent fates of their relatives and their connections to the site.³⁸

The Facebook page accumulated followers; the primary audience, as well as those who were not present at the event, wrote comments to give their second-hand impressions of Fellman Field and share their family stories. ‘My grandfather's mother was right there in the camp in her time and made it out physically but not mentally,’ wrote one.³⁹ The page acts as a site where the voices of the primary and secondary audience mix. As such we argue that the page formed a virtual site of encounter and participation expanding the limits and influence of the piece through commenting, commemorating, story-sharing, even poetry.

(Fig. 2)

From the viewpoint of producing embodied empathy we argue that the discussion of and return to the performance in the Facebook page enforces the experience of the primary audience. The bodily experience, otherwise disappearing, can be revisited. Furthermore the stories shared by the secondary audience added depth to the impact. The secondary audience cannot reach the embodied empathy of the primary audience but they see evidence of the effectiveness of the performance. An impression of an emotionally impactful experience is unavoidable based on the multitude of glowing comments: ‘Thanks for letting me be a part of it. I won’t ever forget it, as it was such a moving moment. I hope we the people never forget what has happened here...’.⁴⁰

Challenges to embodied empathy

According to Mike Pearson, the context of a site may elicit particular modes of engagement from the participants. As Pearson puts it: ‘Any encounter with site is potentially divisive, recovering that which was thought lost—reawakening memories, stirring emotions, mobilizing causes. [...] Performance may need to tread carefully, or at least accept responsibility for what it might disturb.’⁴¹ *Fellman Field* certainly stirred emotions. The civil war is a sensitive subject for many Finns, especially people of older generations who were often indirectly, if not directly, affected by the conflict. For each new generation of Finns, the trauma of the civil war has become, if not less shocking, then at least less personal; so much so that few are aware of the side of the conflict on which their own family members stood. The lack of knowledge is due in part to a culture of silence around the topic that persisted for years. Both sides contributed to this silence: the losing side—the Reds and their families—kept quiet out of shame and possible retributions, while voices on the White side found remembering wartime violence unnecessary or inconvenient.⁴² For many, only temporal distance from the events has allowed an unobstructed processing of the facts. ‘The first generation experiences, the second keeps silent and the third finds out. I belong to the third one. It has felt very heavy and wearing to try to find out. My only son already knows everything and his children will certainly remember.’⁴³

Some Finns are still painfully aware of their relatives' position in the war. One participant in Salmi's work sympathised with descendants of the Red victims: '... As I looked around me in Fellman Park, I recognised plenty of comrades whose families continue to carry the burden of being a victim.'⁴⁴ While the question of wartime allegiances generally no longer divides the nation into two camps, tensions can still arise, usually in political contexts.⁴⁵ The word 'comrade' (Finn. *toveri*) is politically charged; it identifies the commentator as an ideological descendant of the socialist Reds and most likely an active member of the contemporary labour movement.

Whether or not *Fellman Field* had a political agenda has been a topic of heated debate. Judging by the public attention to the issue of Salmi's political views as well as the outraged reactions of some politically-orientated citizens, the issue of politics is the burning question about the piece, even taking precedence over the theme of reconciliation. Many seemed willing to interpret the work as a political statement—a comment on the outcome of the war—and they wanted to know what the intended message was. Various choices made by the artist have been taken as signs of political bias and an attempt to 'point the finger'. A participant's relationship to the politics of the conflict thus affected their response to the work.

According to Diana Taylor, there are always problems with appropriating social memories: Who is allowed to tell the story of whom? How can a person relate to the suffering and trauma of someone from a different generation and era?⁴⁶ In our opinion the question of appropriating considers not only social and cultural memories but also political memories. Having strong political convictions might challenge the ability to empathize with one's ideological 'other', since it makes one opt out for fear of disingenuity and manipulation, and thus hinder the experience of embodied empathy.

Certainly, the site of the performance was anything but neutral. It is significant that the performance site was not only historically relevant, but also a place of largely one-sided violence. Fellman Field was not a battleground; it was the location of a prison camp. The choice—to build the performance around a camp that imprisoned only Reds—was interpreted by some as an indication of political bias, as it allegedly elevated the memory of Red victims over White ones. Another suspect choice was featuring a monument commemorating Red prisoners as a centrepiece of the staging. This alienated some Finns who had strong White roots in the war.⁴⁷

Indeed, treading on the site of a past civil war, Salmi has awakened some tragic memories and exposed fault lines that had long been buried. Has the artist accepted responsibility for the reactions to her choice of performance site, as Pearson suggests artists should? Salmi's declarations of political non-alignment generated backlash from both ends of the political spectrum.⁴⁸ Some members of the labour movement were outraged after Salmi dissociated her piece from a leftist-themed weekend that coincided with the Lahti event. This following Facebook comment exemplifies the concern of workers' organisations regarding the non-political approach to the civil war:

I believe that these events should not be organised by private individuals who claim that the event is not political. Talking about Red prisoners is always political, and dealing with that belongs to the workers' parties and organisations. Despite the request, it is not the time to reconcile nor to forgive. Who asks for forgiveness and from whom?⁴⁹

Salmi still refused to take political sides.⁵⁰ Her team reacted to the debate by stating that 'Salmi's piece was political as an action and as an experience, and we have not tried to hide that. However, in our communications before the event, party-political non-alignment was an unconditionally important definition of policy.'⁵¹ Salmi's statements about her political non-alignment provoked a great deal of discussion in the Facebook page. At least to some participants,

Salmi's statement of neutrality seemed reasonable. One Facebook comment reads, 'The causes of suffering may be political, but suffering in itself is non-political. The performance succeeded in demonstrating that in a great way. Whether a Red Finland would have been better than a White one is politics, and in the face of suffering the question loses its relevance.'⁵²

From the expressions of concern about commemorating the civil war outside the context of the labour movement emerged the question of who is allowed to commemorate the events of a war. To revisit Taylor's remarks on the potential problem of cultural impersonation and appropriation: who has the ownership to a social memory?⁵³ When brought to a political context, is it possible or even appropriate to relate to the pain of someone who represents the opposite side of the conflict? This framing poses another important question: does every contemporary Finn have a side in the conflict? There is no reliable way to allocate anyone today a side in a war based on ideology and class that was fought a hundred years ago. Even the family lineage of a contemporary Finn is often more complex than all White or all Red. If organising commemorative events for Red victims were to be reserved to the labour movement, political alignment would determine an individual's suitability to take part in the act of remembering the victims of the civil war. If we accept that the right to address a trauma is reserved for the ideological descendants of the victims, we run the risk of polarising the commemorative process. Having separate events for Red and White victims undoubtedly perpetuates the discord and leaves out all those Finns who resist taking a side. To achieve reconciliation, we might have to accept that it is important for anyone to be able to take part in the act of commemorating.

Conclusion: Steps towards reconciliation

The gathering of thousands shaped a collective performance that enabled the sensation of embodied empathy through bodily movements. Those present were offered insight into the events of the war and a window on the experience of those who suffered during the conflict. Endeavouring

to achieve embodied empathy is a constructive gesture in itself, an expression of solidarity towards the generations affected by the war, and an attempt at reconciliation.

There have been efforts on both cultural and official levels to create understanding and reconciliation in the Finnish society of which *Fellman Field* was a part. One indication of attempts to reconcile was the change in attitude towards memorials for the defeated. For over two decades after the war, monuments to Red soldiers (where they existed at all) were mostly found in remote places like woods or swamps, often near unofficial graves of fallen Red soldiers. Changes in the political climate came in the 1940s, when all Finns fought together against the Soviet Union, and still more in the 1950s, when monuments to Reds began to be permitted in official locations such as cemeteries. Finally, it was possible to restore unofficial graves and, for the first time, have them clerically consecrated.⁵⁴

An official step towards reconciliation was the national project called War Victims of Finland 1914-1922 (*Suomen sotasurmat 1914-1922*), a database in which the names of the country's war victims in these years was registered. The project was initiated by Finland's prime minister at the time and funded by the Finnish government in the years 1998-2003.⁵⁵

Its aim was to collect information about those who perished in war-related circumstances in Finland, the idea being that the database could then be used as objective source material for future research. The project's greater goal was to 'definitively dismantle the national trauma caused by the war of 1918'.⁵⁶ At present, the online registry (which has been used by more than 1.2 million visitors) contains over 35,000 names of war dead, 97 per cent of whom died in the war of 1918 or its aftermath.⁵⁷

However commendable this project is, we believe that simply collecting data will not be sufficient to achieve national reconciliation. Moreover, we do not think that the finalisation of the process is a goal worth pursuing. We do not endorse the project's promise of an ultimate

resolution to the trauma, as we believe that declaring the process completed will in fact silence necessary discussion. Consider that even ten years after the closure of the War Victims project, *Fellman Field* triggered disagreements on this subject. In fact, it is the discussion and reception of *Fellman Field* in 2013 that indicates how highly sensitive a topic the civil war remains in Finland to this day, nor has the matter been put to rest. Along with accurate information about the war, we need other ways to handle the trauma.

While site-specific art work goes some way to reckoning with the effects of trauma, we believe that the addition of a participatory quality enables the emergence of collectively-felt embodied empathy. This quality and the impact of the performance were recognised in the public discussion about *Fellman Field*. For example, an editorial in the newspaper *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* stated: 'It is part of the reconciliation that even those people who do not have a personal connection with the events can participate in and identify with them, and share the pain and agony that was felt on Fellman field in April 1918.'⁵⁸ Even though the performance generated political discussion and raised tensions, it also reconciled many participants with their history (as can be seen from the comments above). The performance was recorded as successfully creating embodied empathy, allowing participants to release their anxieties over the violence of the past.⁵⁹

Even among all the positive experiences, the possibility of reconciliation still divided opinions of both participants and commentators. It is likely that people understood the notion of reconciliation in a very different ways and not always how the artist had intended. Based on the reception, parts of the audience assumed the attempted reconciliation to lie between the parties involved in the conflict. Instead the artist aimed for reconciliation in terms of accepting historical events. Peace was tentatively built between the present and the past instead of being built between the parties to the war.

If the purpose had been to settle the conflict between the Reds and the Whites—or, in fact, their ideological and/or familial descendants—the choice of site would not have been suitable since it so strongly represents Red suffering. For those who viewed the performance from this standpoint, the site appeared so politically charged and partial as to obstruct their willingness to engage in embodied empathy. To be more effective in terms of soliciting empathic engagement, the performance might have benefitted from being organized on a site as neutral as possible. On the other hand, Salmi preferred to create a mass participatory performance around the symbolism of thousands of people on Fellman field in 1918 and on the day of the performance.⁶⁰ The specific demands of the performance concept seemed to overrule the ideal of neutrality of the site.

In addition to the site some of the commentators felt sceptical about finding common ground due to other factors, such as the bitter memory of the arbitrary violence of wartime,⁶¹ the closeness of one's family tragedy⁶² or the suspicion of the event's political agenda⁶³. Some openly denied the possibility of reconciliation through performance: 'I do not believe in an overall performance reconciliation; reconciliation is not a mass event. A performance can be the beginning of a process and a new way of sharing and experiencing, but it cannot guarantee an end to the pain.'⁶⁴

The volume of comments and the variety of opinions in the media proves the performance an exceptionally successful catalyst for public discussion, offering a platform for dealing with Finland's civil war trauma. Primary and secondary audiences came together to discuss and participate at different sites, both material and virtual. In the case of *Fellman Field*, the active discussion on the Facebook page offered a window into the first hand experiences of the participants and enabled anyone to chime in with their impressions. In our view, a few disagreeing voices do not invalidate the reconciling quality of *Fellman Field*. On the contrary, the plurality of opinion is a prerequisite to the process of reconciliation. As stated earlier, reconciliation need not mean a final resolution of a conflict and lasting peace. Nor does it mean an 'end to the pain' or even

forgiveness. Rather, reconciliation might be an invitation to a conversational space between two poles of silence—the first of which is suppression and the second of which is closure—a space accessible to all through embodied empathy. Site-specific participatory performances are particularly effective in producing these spaces, which is why they can mediate societal crises and traumatic histories.

FIGURES

FIGURE 1 Prisoners on the Fellman field in 1918. Photo: Lahti City Museum Picture Archives.

FIGURE 2

Screengrab of Fellman Field Facebook page.

BIOS:

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¹ Marja-Leena Parkkinen's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 'Fellmanin pelto - 22 000 ihmisen elävä monumentti', 28 April 2013 (12:21 p.m.), https://www.facebook.com/FellmaninPeldo/?ref=br_rs, accessed 13 April 2018

² Mike Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 141.

³ Salmi (b. 1968) is known for her many environmental artworks in urban milieux and also for such huge eye-catching works as *Road to Heaven* (2011) and *The Bottle Sea*, made of 300,000 swimming bottles (2015). She positions herself as a maker of political art, asking questions such as 'What does art activism mean to its maker?' and 'What drives an artist to make political art?' Oulun kaupunki, https://www.ouka.fi/oulu/kulttuuri-ja-kirjastot/ajankohtaista/-/asset_publisher/2fVr/content/kaisa-salmi-fellmanin-peldo/477502, accessed 5 November 2018. In July 2016 Salmi presented another participatory performance about the civil war: *Veripelto* (Field of Blood). 'Veripelto muistutti väkivallan mielettömyydestä Jättömaalla — yhteisöperformanssi keräsi noin 300 osallistujaa', *Kouvolan Sanomat*, 23 July, 2016, <https://kouvolasanomat.fi/uutiset/lahella/68569954-23e3-4e53-8cca-4bdbe9c93f3a>, accessed 29 May 2018.

⁴ The phenomenon of embodied empathy (sometimes referred to as kinaesthetic empathy) is supported by neuroscientific research and the concept is used in the practise of psychotherapy and art therapy. We find corresponding features between these practises and *Fellman Field*: that is, an attempt to create a space for attachment with a 'broader humanity' through bodily simulation. Writing on embodied simulation, Vittorio Gallese suggests 'A common underlying functional mechanism [...] mediates our capacity to experientially share the meaning of actions, intentions, feelings, and emotions with others, thus grounding our identification with and connectedness to others.' See Vittorio Gallese, 'Empathy, embodied simulation and the brain: commentary on Aragno and Zep/Hartmann', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 56, 3 (2008), pp. 769-781, here p. 773. See also, for example, David Alan Harris, 'Pathways to embodied empathy and reconciliation after atrocity: Former boy soldiers in a dance/movement therapy group in Sierra Leone' *Intervention*, 5, 3 (2007), pp. 203-231; and Jon Sletvold, 'Embodied empathy in

psychotherapy: Demonstrated in supervision, Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy,’ *Journal Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy*, 10, 2 (2015), pp. 82-93.

⁵ Although we interpret these social media discussions as expressions of participant experiences as well as micro-examples of the public debate surrounding the piece, we are aware of the limitations of online comments as indicators of audience response. Participants in *Fellman Field* have not been interviewed nor have they been surveyed for the purpose of this article. The description of the performance is based on documentation, not participation.

⁶ Henrik Meinander, *Gustaf Mannerheim Aristokraatti sarkatakissa* (Helsinki: Otava 2017) p. 111; Tuomas Tepora, ‘Satavuotinen sota? Sisällissodan muistamisesta ja historiakulttuurista’, *Historiallinen aikakauskirja*, 116, 2 (2018), pp. 181-8, pp. 181-2.

⁷ Tuomas Tepora and Aapo Roselius, eds., *The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, memory, legacy* (Leiden: Brill Online 2014) p. 1.

⁸ Ibid., p.1.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 1-5.

¹⁰ Marko Tikka, ‘Warfare and Terror in 1918’ in Tuomas Tepora & Aapo Roselius, *The Finnish Civil War 1918: history, memory, legacy*, pp. 90-118, p. 113.

¹¹ Hennala was one of the largest and most infamous prison camps of the Civil War 1918.

¹² Seppo Hentilä, ‘From Independence to the End of the Continuation War 1917–1944’, in Seppo Hentilä, Osmo Jussila, Jukka Nevakivi, *From Grand Duchy to a Modern State: A Political History of Finland since 1809* (London: Hurst, 1999), pp. 99-213, p. 112.

¹³ Tepora & Roselius, *The Finnish Civil War 1918: history, memory, legacy*, p. 5.

¹⁴ Milija Gluhovic, *Performing European Memories: Trauma, Ethics, Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 10.

¹⁵ ‘Tuhannet tahtovat Lahteen muistamaan vankileirin’, Yle News, 23 April 2013 <http://yle.fi/uutiset/3-6607021> accessed 22 October 2018; ‘The common event for all is a conciliatory and peaceful, soulful journey to the spring of 1918’; ‘All family members, including kids, are welcome’’ Fellman Field Facebook page, accessed 29 May 2018. All the translations of the Finnish texts into English are by the authors. The originals are available upon request. Quoted from Kaisa Salmi; see Juha Säijälä, ‘Punavankien kärsimykset massaperformanssiksi’, *Kulttuurivihkot*, 23 April 2013, <http://kulttuurivihkot.fi/lehti/jutut/uutiset/364-punavankien-karsimykset-massaperformanssiksi>, accessed 29 May 2018.

¹⁶ Although the concept was developed by Salmi, she collaborated with artist Teemu Mäki, choreographer Hanna Brotherus and musician Heikki Salo to create the performance text, which was then realized by professional actors and musicians, Kaisa Korhonen ja Mikko Kuustonen among others.

¹⁷ A fragment of the text in question can be found on Fellmanin pelto – 22 000 ihmisen elävä monumentti’, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IW582Axwoq0>, accessed 29 May 2018.

¹⁸ Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*, pp. 143-4.

¹⁹ Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past. Volume I: Conflicts and Divisions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 17.

²⁰ Ulla-Maija Peltonen, *Muistin paikat. Vuoden 1918 sisällissodan muistamisesta ja unohtamisesta* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura 2003) p. 234. In Lahti, two monuments had been erected earlier to commemorate the fallen White soldiers (1921) and the fallen German soldiers who fought on the White side (1920).

²¹ Fiona Wilkie, ‘Mapping the Terrain: A Survey of Site-Specific Performance in Britain’, *New Theatre Quarterly* vol 18 (2) 2002, pp. 140–160, here pp. 143–4.

²² Silja Kelo’s comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 28 April 2013 (07:26 p.m.), accessed 17 August 2017.

²³ Katri Hakamäki’s comment on Fellman Field Facebook Page, 30 April 2013 (05:55 a.m.), accessed 17 August 2017.

²⁴ Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005) p. 42.

²⁵ Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*, p. 29.

²⁶ Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*, pp. 49-50, 141.

²⁷ Merja Vatanen’s comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 28 April 2013 (09:01 p.m.), accessed 17 August 2017.

²⁸ Jouko Enkelnotko’s comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 29 April 2013 (08.12 p.m.), accessed 17 August 2017.

²⁹ Hanna K. H. Kopra’s comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 28 April 2013 (04:23 p.m.), accessed 17 August 2017.

³⁰ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso 2012), p. 2.

³¹ Ibid., p. 9.

³² On the centennial of the civil war's end, 15 May 2018, the documentary was aired on Yle Teema Fem Finnish Broadcasting Company, the national television network.

³³ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 193.

³⁴ A comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 28 April 2013 (10:37 a.m.), accessed 13 April 2018. 'The experience took me vividly to that time. Especially the search (looking for) for pieces of bread transported me to the midst of those people's suffering.'

³⁵ Marjaana Kontu's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page 28 April 2013 (7:25 a.m.) accessed 27 June 2018 'It was great to take part—to squeeze some grandpa who I didn't know.'

³⁶ Sruti Bala, 'Vectors of Participation in Contemporary Theatre and Performance', *Theatre Research International* 37(3) 2012, pp. 236–248, here p. 245.

³⁷ See Bala, 'Vectors of Participation in Contemporary Theatre and Performance', p. 246.

³⁸ 'Tuhannet muistelivat punavankien kohtaloa,' *Helsingin Sanomat*, 28 April, 2013, accessed 30 November 2014 <http://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/a1367113411755>, accessed 29 May 2018. Pekka Hongisto's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 24 March 2013 (06:21 p.m.), accessed 9 March, 2018.

³⁹ Minna Virtanen's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 2 October 2013 (11:02 p.m.), accessed 17 August 2017.

⁴⁰ Pipsa Inervo's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 28 April 2013 (08.44 p.m.), accessed 29 May 2018.

⁴¹ Pearson, *Site-Specific Performance*, pp. 143-4.

⁴² Peltonen, *Muistin paikat. Vuoden 1918 sisällissodan muistamisesta ja unohtamisesta*, pp. 10-13, 17.

⁴³ Kaija Irmeli Olin-Arvola's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 29 April 2013, (14:03 p.m.), accessed 29 May 2018.

⁴⁴ Antti Huopalaianen's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 28 April 2013 (11:32 a.m.), accessed 10 June 2017.

⁴⁵ Tepora and Roselius, *The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, memory, legacy*, p. 5.

⁴⁶ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p. 195.

⁴⁷ Martti Lehto's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 26 April 2013 (10.06 a.m.), accessed 23 March 2018.

⁴⁸ *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat* 27 April 2013; A published note on the work group for Fellman's Field Facebook page 29 April 2013 (08:53 a.m.), accessed 27 June 2018.

⁴⁹ A comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 30 April 2013 (3:41 a.m.), accessed 14 March 2017. The comment has since been removed. The labour movement represents the Reds' political tradition in present day Finland.

⁵⁰ A comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 30 April 2013 (01:07 p.m.), accessed 27 June 2018.

⁵¹ A comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 29 April 2013 (01:18 a.m.), accessed 10 June 2017;; Laura Kokkonen's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 28 April 2013 (18:53 p.m.) accessed 27 June 2018.

⁵² Ville Hoikkala's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, 29 April 2013 (01:18 a.m.), accessed 10 June 2017.

⁵³ Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, p. 195.

⁵⁴ Peltonen, *Muistin paikat. Vuoden 1918 sisällissodan muistamisesta ja unohtamisesta*, pp. 221-8.

⁵⁵ Tepora and Roselius, *The Finnish Civil War 1918: History, memory, legacy*, p. 12-3. The government funding for the War Victims in Finland 1914-1922 project was 1.7 million euro.

⁵⁶ Työväenliikkeen kirjasto,
<http://www.tyovaenperinne.fi/tyovaentutkimus/tt2005/nettiversio/tk3.htm>, accessed 29 May 2018.

⁵⁷ See War Victims of Finland 1914-1922 Project Database, <http://vesta.narc.fi/cgi-bin/db2www/sotasurmaetusivu/main?lang=en>, accessed 27 June 2018.

⁵⁸ <https://www.ess.fi/Mielipide/paakirjoitukset/2013/04/30/alkaako-fellmanin-puistosta-sovinto>, accessed 29 May 2018.

⁵⁹ Pauliina Arva, 'Pellolla performanssissa tein sovintoa historian kanssa', Liinan blogi (blog), 28 April, 2013, <https://liinanblogi.com/2013/04/28/pellolla-performanssissa-tein-sovintoa-historian-kanssa/>, accessed 29 May 2018.

⁶⁰ To be exact, 22,000 people; hence the title *Fellman's Field: A Living Monument to 22,000 People*.

⁶¹ Pentti Sjöblom's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, April 28, 2013 (12:21 p.m.), accessed 14 March 2017. The comment has since been removed.

⁶² Marja-Leena Parkkinen's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, April 15, 2013 (5.47 p.m.), accessed 27 June 2018.

⁶³ Martti Lehto's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, April 26, 2013. (10.16 a.m.), accessed 23 March 2018.

⁶⁴ Marja-Leena Parkkinen's comment on Fellman Field Facebook page, April 28, 2013 (12:21 p.m.), accessed 13 April 2018.